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Green - The Trial of Constancy - 1826.

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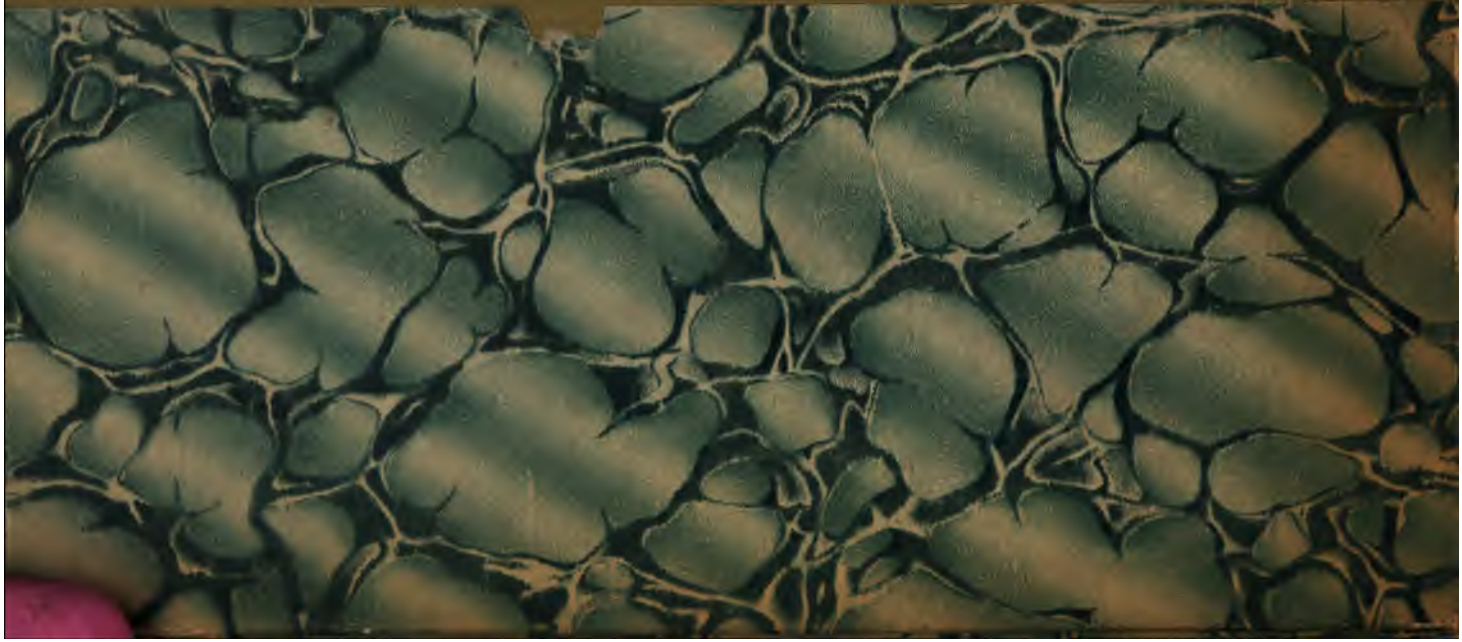

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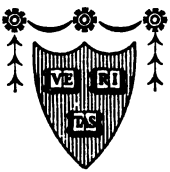

FROM THE BEQUEST OF

SUSAN GREENE DEXTER

THE

Trial of Constancy;

OR, THE

INTRIGUING LOVERS.

A POEM.

BY

GEORGE GREEN.

Oh, how this spring of love resembleth
Th' uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shews all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away!

SHAKSPEARE.

1826.

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THE TRIAL OF CONSTANCY.

NEAR Humber's stream, if all be true that's said,
Lived Henry Beck, and in a cot he dwelled,
Peace and Content as inmates only stayed—
Fortune from him was far, alas! expelled.
His sire was rich, and once of great repute
As any round about the Humber place;
But soon his riches lost their firmest root,
And Sorrow started early in the chase.

This blow they suffered with a mind serene,
That few are found to meet Misfortune's frown;
Nor once regretted that they rich had been,
Or wished for what was higher than their own.
Fortune left peace, but took their wealth away—
Contentment dwelt within their cottage door—
He ply'd his hands to learn to work by day,
And earn his bread—content, he asks no more!

On Fortune's gifts, contented did they live,
Nor sighed for that which was beyond their reach;
No ambition inquietude did give—
Peace and Content surround the hearts of each.
Oh! could mankind, by this example, see
The art of peace and virtue's only way,
That they, like him, might then contented be,
And own that they're beneath Misfortune's sway!

Oft would they talk of this dejected theme,
And oft converse on former days and peace;
But deemed it all the work of Heav'n supreme,
Which soon can raise and can as soon decrease.
Oft they'd recount, but with a peaceful air,
The acts of Fortune in this dreadful blow,
Which brought the wealth of this true happy pair
From their high summit to a path so low!

Now all his wealth to him a vision seemed,
Which glows before our much deluded eyes,
That in some high or glaring colour gleamed,
Which, while we grasp, away the phantom flies.
A vision 'tis that glares before our eyes,
Which oft misleads the trembling foot of man,
That, by the ray which stands before the prize,
Makes life itself the shadow of a span.

Return, my muse, my roving muse return.
To their son Henry let me turn again;
He now so poor in happier times was born,
To him now let me breathe my simple strain.
But Peace did soon o'er them her mantle fling,
And smoothed the path of Fortune's iron sway;
Content what Fortune whatsoe'er shall bring
Within their reach on life's most thorny way.

Brought up beneath his prudent parents' care,
And taught by them true virtue's only way;
The seeds so sown, the buds of virtue rare,
May tend to bless him on some happier day.
Ere he had first sound Reason's cap put on,
And Manhood blest him with a manly brow,
In weaker age his morning task would con,
To inculcate the seeds of virtue true.

Nature endowed him with a fervent mind,
Friendly to ev'ry earthly virtue dear,
And few like him we now shall meet behind,
At least of such we now shall seldom hear.
Oh! for the time when such firm virtue rare,
Belonged to each and ev'ry manly heart;
But, oh! could I those simple traits compare,
Which now are found beyond all human art!

Though Ill-fate now had blasted ev'ry hope,
And left him all dependence on his sire;
Till taught by him where all the blessings ope,
He tastes the joys that breathe with peaceful hire.
Diff'rent his mind in youthful age employed!
How changed th' estate which Fortune once had sent!
But if all this his mind had e'er annoyed,
Fortune exchanged and blest him with content.

Once George, his sire, an invitation got
From a 'Squire Freeling, to his country seat;
He was their friend when their affairs were not—
Not as they are, but when they were complete.
He was their friend, though not so ardent now,
When Fortune kind was in the gifts she sends,
And 'tis e'en said, and I believe it true.
He would replaced, but was afraid t' offend.

Much were they greeted when they first arrived;
They told the tale their absence from them wrought,
Nor e'en forgot how Fortune had deprived
Them of those things they had so dearly bought.
Announced was dinner by the tinkling bell.
They soon did quit their once more welcomed spot—
The 'Squire bid an affectionate farewell—
They sought again their happy little cot.

They all, save Henry, were of blithesome strains,
And passed the time in most delightful talk;
While he from all their converse sweet refrains,
Nor scarcely spoke while on their homeward walk:
They scarce arrived till their consent he got,
Himself again to Freeling's house remove;
Where he might gaze on that delightful spot,
That now contained the object of his love!

To Freeling's house delighted soon he flew,
To see, once more, the object of his heart;
Maria, whom he scarcely ever knew,
Till all at once he felt soft Cupid's dart.
Ere he arrived, he halted to compose
His shattered nerves and breathing almost spent,
And calm the hope which love had quickly rose:
This was the case on which he now was bent.

When he was right he gave a gentle tap;
His heart beat quickly with emotion high,
Which even now his senses seemed to wrap,
Ran o'er his face and pressed with lovely dye.
The door being opened, soon he entered in,
With looks of joy and eye that beamed most sweet,
That seemed but formed to captivate and win
The hearts of those it e'er might chance to meet!

"Ah! welcome, boy, the image of thy sire,
Most welcome," said the 'Squire, "thou lovely boy!
Thy image could a father's hope inspire,
And raise it to the highest pitch of joy.
Oh! had I been blessed with a child like thee,
My favourite youth, I would be happy now;
All that wisdom or learning e'er could be,
Is there depicted on thy manly brow!"

"Ah! sir, those words! I feel their mighty weight—
Eulogy oft has been bestowed on me;
But, for you, sir, my love shall but abate
When death has ta'en me far away from thee!
Oft have my parents praised my smiling look,
In brighter times have hung about my neck,
But now its over, Fortune has forsook,
And hire is left for simple Henry Beck!"

"Hire!" now quivered on the lips of Freeling,
"Labour, never!" and then did madly storm;
While he exhibited such a manly feeling
As ne'er had been pourtrayed in human form.
This gust of passion was then quickly o'er,
And peace once more again was soon restored,
And ne'er again that "hoarse and deaf'ning roar"
Is heard to annoy their joyful festive board.

"Alas! my youth, I know thy father's pride,
And gifts from me would but offend him now,
Or soon would I this most destructive tide
Turn from off thee and calm thy anxious brow.
The reason's thus that now restrains my purse,
Or long ere now you should have heard from me,
And not have suffered by that fell remorse,
Nor pined at Fortune in this low degree."

"On Fortune's gifts content my father lives,"
Henry then said, "nor does he ask for more,
And with a smile takes what hard Fortune gives,
Sweet peace to plant within his cottage door.
Whate'er his thoughts on all his former wealth,
Might now be on his much degraded state,
He prays kind Salus for his strength and health,
And calmly sits and smiles at frowning Fate."

"My boy, his friendship much do I revere,
He was," said Freeling, "once the same for me.
We think on him in conversation here,
With tears and thoughts of softest sympathy.
Of this enough: I oft have thought of thee,
To take beneath, with thy good will, my care,
Here thou shouldst stay and live along with me,
And all the pleasures of my fam'ly share.

"Nor think thy father would objection raise
To this, my boy, a poor request of mine;
Thou'lt hid be only from his ardent gaze,
That thou ere long may brighter on him shine."
He thanked him now, and grateful did retire
Up to his neat apartment for the night,
Where he gave vent into his arm'rous fire,
Which now gave him a feeling of delight.

Pleased with the thought which now before him shone,
And all its plays he knew not where would end;
Sure Love, he thought, on his imperial throne,
His smiling looks would ne'er refuse to send.
He thus pursued till sleep had closed his eyes,
Then rested in the fresh'ning arms of sleep;
When thus refreshed might with new vigour rise,
At cocks' loud call or at the morning's peep.

As soon as Chanticleer's shrill voice was heard,
It bent its way to Henry's watchful ear,
Who quickly rose and then himself prepared
To meet th' enjoyment of a morning clear.
The hills again, so oft the source of joy,
Behold him on their proud majestic brow,
Where he would oft the pleasing hours destroy,
When time went slow, but this was seldom now.

The morn breathed still, the birds' loud chatt'ring song,
The skylark's note that breathed most clear and shrill;
The zephyrs then most gently swept along
The fresh'ning breeze to each enchanting hill.
The gentle waving of the huge oak trees,
The willow green which solemn waved below;
All hearts in vain it could not fail to please,
But make each think a paradise in show!

Such were his walks when in the morning light,
And eve would close the musings of the day;
When sleep would dim what morning rendered bright—
Morning waked it to a doubly lustred ray.
Feeling soon saw with a delightful eye,
That his young heart was on bright learning set;
And ev'ry pleasure of his feeling high
Would ne'er have stopt if he with learning met.

He thanked his stars for ev'ry bounty now—
Their gifts flowed round much faster than before,
And with their gifts might help young Henry through,
Whose ev'ry care was learning's brightest store.
He loved the youth, aye, loved him as his own,
And then as such to school he soon was sent;
For oft has he by his firm study shown,
His soul's desire was on bright learning bent.

Maria sweet would buy his fav'rite books,
In whose fair breast the softest flames now rose;
And oft she'd praise the boy's most august looks,
Whose pleasant brow with ev'ry learning glows.
Ardent affection soon between them rose;
Each tender breast was filled with arm'rous fire,
As pure and soft as summer breeze oft blows—
As Love's sweet wish when all his hopes aspire.

But, ah! should sad sorrow ever stoop to reign
In such a world for other scenes to bless,
And cause that breast to rend with ev'ry pain,
Which might have lived and soon sweet love caress.
But it's been said, and will he said again,
True balmy bliss was not for us below;
If e'er our hopes then rose beyond our pain,
The next loud blast would cause our overthrow.

A coldness grew between those lovers sweet,
(Henry knew not, 'twas not with him it grew)
When he came home she seldom now did greet
Him with that eye which once beamed sweet and true.
Oft did he try, but never yet could learn,
Why beamed on him that eye of cold disdain;
For none he knew her dear bought love could earn,
To trifle thus with such immortal pain.

But all enquiry gave him not that ease,
His mighty pow'r might bear him to expect;
And soon that form passed in by slow degrees
T'one unthoughtful, sluggard and neglect.
His study firm, which once was all his pride,
Romantic thought once spurned to be confined;
When these were gone, his brightest prospects died,
And left no emblem of his brighter mind.

Yet he once deemed that he would think no more,
On one who would so soon inconstant prove;
But bend his way and some one else adore,
One who would be more worthy of his love.
But to forsake her! it were worse than death;
He tried his means, but found them all in vain,
And when fatigued and all but spent his breath,
Would then relapse into his state again.

Then would his eye, which once was bright, assume
The looks of love when saddened with despair;
And that bright brow would share unnat'ral gloom,
Which once was bright and shone so wond'rous fair!
He then resolved upon a deadly plan,
Too oft resolved by our weak mortal frame,
Which if it gains no object to the man,
The world will cease to know our mortal name.

Wrapt in darkness, we then shall know no more
This busy world with all its troubling pains;
And then the sea, with its tremendous roar,
Will cease to foam with all its glutted gains.
T' inform her of his deadly purpose, now
Collects his pow'rs and then he sent a note,
To tell the anguish of his burning brow,
What her inconstance on his form had wrought.

"Farewell ye scenes which can no more impart
One sacred sigh into this anxious heart!
Farewell ye bow'rs that in the days of peace
Would calm my heart and bid my fears to cease!
In soft sweet tones then tell the lovers sweet
To enjoy the time when they shall chance to meet,
With that pure love which there alone can dwell—
Oh! blissful scenes, to you I bid farewell!

"Oh! blissful scenes, could ye surround me now,
T' evade the deed that I'm about to do;
And with your sweets bring to my sense again
The sweets of love into my quiv'ring brain!
Bring back my sense submissive to your feet,
Where all is calm and all so wond'rous sweet!
Where all your hosts in peaceful mansions dwell—
Oh! ye sweet bow'rs, for ever fare ye well!

"Maria, now my last farewell's to thee,
Who am not what I once perchance might be;
Had not thy falsehood stamped it on thy brow,
What I ne'er thought, what time has shewn me now!
Could I have guessed, what time has shown to me,
When first these eyes too fondly dwelt on thee,
I'd crushed the hopes which learned too soon to dwell
In this fond breast, but ever fare thee well!

"Yet in the arms of fond sweet love caressed,
Long may you live and in his arms be blessed,
T'enjoy the peace of health and strength of mind,
And may he be the best of human kind:
Yet let fond Mem'ry drop her kindest tear,
For one whose love was much rejected here,
Whose indigence forbade him here to dwell—
Maria, oh! for ever fare thee well!

"Wheree'er may fate allot a place for thee,
Oh! think on him thou'st doomed to misery,
Whose love most pure by thee has thus been spurned,
Who died obscure and passed away unmourned.
Beneath the waves in yon tempestuous deep
There will I take my last eternal sleep!
Adieu! ye bow'rs—Maria, fare thee well!
Beneath the waves I now have fixed to dwell!"

When he'd thus wrote, it soon away was sent,
While he remained a black and gloomy scene;
And then would think upon his dread intent,
Or muse perhaps on what he might have been.
He was not deaf to all the force of fame,
Nor destitute of what he once had thought;
And thought yet still to gain a lasting name,
Though perhaps hard, it might be dearly bought.

He went to where he must his hopes resign,
And think no more upon this world's confine;
Where he for ever all his hopes must yield,
And bid farewell to Fame's enchanting field!
When he arrived and viewed the trembling deep,
A place where he was destined soon to sleep,
His heart failed him, and he could no more
Look on pale death as he was wont before!
With nerves most bold to give his heart that ease,
Which in this world he knew not how t' appease;
But waits awhile till some one might be near,
T'arouse his heart and snatch him from that fear,
Which now seized on his enervated frame,
Chilled that pow'r to which other things laid claim.
He did not wait ere long a boat was seen.
To pass each wave and fly the air most keen.
He laughed it off and treat the deed most slight,
Which soon he hoped would end to his delight.
But to be brief, 'twas machinations own,
To bring to him his fair enslaving one.
If she proved true, as she once seemed to say,
'Twould change his night into the brightest day:
If she proved false, he then would think no more
To let her live where she had reigned before.
Once more around his frame his courage flows,
And plunges where o'erwhelming billows rose!

The boatman quick saw what the youth had done,
Set all his sails that he might faster run
To that dread spot, he thought the awful deed
Had just occurred, and give his help in need.
The boat arrived, as Henry would think,
To save him from impending danger's brink.
He saw the youth, and then with courage warm
Rescued him soon and gave the loud alarm.
Soon to his aid great numbers flocked around,
While Henry lay prostrated on the ground.
The crowd flocked round while Henry prostrate lay,
Who soon resolved to bear the youth away;
But ere 'twas fixed, Maria trembling came,
While terror seized upon her frenzied frame,
Who, when she saw him, as he senseless lay,
She shrieked aloud and then she swooned away.
She soon revived, and then with mournful cries
She sobbed her grief where prostrate Henry lies,
And gave herself to ev'ry mental grief,
Which she now found inane of all relief!
Her Henry dear amongst the rustic crowd,
The tool of which their own wild course pursued;
Simple, though void of ev'ry treach'rous art,
And worthy far of some more noble heart!
When she saw this, she gave a shriek so loud,
That made them stand the freighted rustic crowd;
Some others ran, while some more sturdy stay,
Who bade her hence from mortal's self decay!
"Decay!" cried she, "nay, fiend, it is not so,
Just Heav'n would strike not such a dreadful blow."
The horrors then all trembling in her face,
They strove with force to take her from the place;
But spurns them all, and with an artful skill
She seeks the place where lies her Henry still!
'Twas soon agreed, by all the rural crew,
To place him with some trusty friend they knew.
On this they fixed, who soon him gently led
And placed him in a neighbour's cottage bed,
Where he was soon, with ev'ry cordial warm,
Pronounced beyond grim Danger's rueful arm;
And in brief while they see him once again
Look up and smile among th' abodes of men!
At this good news Maria's heart got ease—
Gave them gold their urgent want t' appease.
Her looks, once wild, were now become serene,
And shone the charms that in her face had been,
And showed the ire e'en gloom should spread a cast
On that fair form which bloomed so fair at last!
She then returned, but none by her fair mein
Could learn the cause on which she just had been.

He wished to know what force the scheme had made,
And asked if they a female fair surveyed?
"There did," they said, "one came who shocked us all
By her wild shriek, her loud and frenzied call,
And gave herself to ev'ry mental grief,
Who wildly sought but could not find relief."
Now Henry smiled, his doubts were now removed,
Though he'd not seen it soon Maria proved.
She soon returned to where her Henry lay,
And learned the news disease had died away;
His health returned, and now once more there came
That blooming look from off his manly frame.
Quick word was sent that one below did wait,
And would come up to where young Henry sate.
Henry prepared and got himself soon drest,
T'await his love his always welcome guest.
'Twas she herself who now all trembling came,
And Henry started when he beheld her frame.
"Henry, start not at such a one as me,
Who comes to ask a simple boon from thee."
"Can I with peace behold that face again,
Or clasp that form the author of my pain?"
"I own I merit this thy sad reproof,
But bid me not from off thee stand aloof.
'Twas but to try if thou would constant prove,
Nor slight me in thy seeming ardent love;
But as I find my Henry still prove true,
My love shall be what to thy worth is due;
But do not bid me from thee hence, away,
Who for that form might soon embrace decay!"
"What means have I, of what thou speak'st of now,
To find the truth and think my love just due?"
"Oh! doubt me not—my future life shall prove
That I'm an object worthy of your love!
Oh! think not that I e'er shall slight again
The breast I love with such incessant pain!"
"Who can withstand such bright and lovely charms!"
And pressed her then into his anxious arms;
His lips then pressed upon that blooming cheek,
And told the joy his tongue refused to speak!
Both now were happy, and now they kindly greet
With words of love that breathe most wond'rous sweet.
Her house once more beholds the tranquil pair,
With blooming mein they walk with stately air,
T'enjoy the feast as they were wont to do,
Where Peace is spread and waved her taper now!
Henry then learned, as by his father told,
Dame Fortune smiled e'en when his limbs were old.
His houses, land, and all his earthly store,
Shone with that splendour they were wont before.

Henry he told not how he had regained
The wealth which Fortune had so long restrained;
And all conspired to make the burden light,
The press of years and Age's falling weight;
But clasped him warmly, and that he, his heir,
Should now enjoy what wealth alone could share!
Henry him thanked, and then to Freeling goes,
Who hailed him kindly after all his woes.
"Fortune now smiles—our wants we can appease—
My heart is pressed which you alone can ease;
Do grant me this—to you I will it own
Till life's bright rays and sparkling star go down!"
He saw direct at what young Henry aimed,
And soon to him the joyful news proclaimed
Into his ear—he gave the youth that joy
Which wealth nor pow'r could ne'er with art destroy.
He told his parents what their bus'ness was,
Which by them both soon gained their great applause.
"It makes me glad, beyond my feeble voice,
To think my son has made so wise a choice."
The maid was called who soon most graceful came,
Decked with all splendour round her lovely frame;
And when they told her wherefore she'd been sent,
She added charms to those the Graces lent;
By her sweet look and her bewitching mein,
The troubled breast which could be plainly seen.
The 'Squire aroused her, "Answer, love," said he:
"What pleases you will also do for me."
Thus were they pleased—the day was fixed upon;
"To-morrow" was embraced by ev'ry one.
Said Henry "Ere to-morrow's setting sun
Shall dim the world, my joy will have begun.
I'll lay my books and ev'ry art aside,
And please the will of my sweet lovely bride;
And thus shall I avoid the ruthless blast,
To hurt that form I've loved until the last!
And thus Maria, till each scene is o'er,
I'll love till love and life shall be no more!
And when we part, each from the other driv'n,
May we again meet joyfully in Heav'n!"

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